

# MATINAMAGEWIN: CONTINUING EDUCATION AT THE UQAT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN TEACHERS



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Since 2010, UQAT's Continuing Education Department, in partnership with the Algonquin Nations Programs and Services Secretariat (ANPSS), has been offering a one-day training session entitled "Piwaseha – First Light of Day." The aim of the course is to improve teachers' understanding of Indigenous cultures and realities so that they can develop partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding. The course was met with keen interest in several organizations, and 4,000 people have taken it so far. Given the success of the program since 2010, UQAT's Continuing Education Department wanted to continue developing training that makes a difference but, this time, in the education sector.

The course "Matinamagewin – Sharing" is aimed at improving school staff's cultural competency in order to create an environment conducive to Indigenous students' learning and educational success. It is also aimed at equipping school staff to integrate Indigenous values, knowledge, culture and languages into programs for the benefit of all students.

Focusing on the development of know-how and soft skills, the Matinamagewin course aims more specifically to raise awareness among school staff of the importance of cultural safety and humility in their practices; foster the incorporation of elements from different Indigenous cultures (history, know-how, soft skills, ways of doing things, activities, workshops, etc.) in order to improve knowledge, reduce prejudice and promote relevant practices with Indigenous students in Indigenous contexts; and encourage communication and collaboration between the school, families and the various Indigenous stakeholders (communities, Elders, friendship centres, band

councils, etc.). In order to achieve these objectives, the course also encourages participants to think about their approaches and practices, and to learn how to incorporate content that promotes Indigenous identity and cultures.

By offering this course, we hope to respond to the needs and calls for action identified in several papers, reference frameworks and reports, from the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) to the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the 2019 Inquiry Commission on Relations Between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Québec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress, to name but a few. These reports emphasize the importance of training, and several of them recommend incorporating Indigenous values, cultures, languages, know-how and soft skills into education programs in order to fight persistent prejudice, improve community life and contribute to Indigenous people's self-esteem and pride in their identity. These recommendations are solutions that can be implemented in schools through the development of cultural competency and humility in education and through the decolonization of education.

According to the Health Council of Canada, cultural competency is about creating an environment that is free of racism, contempt and stereotypes, where Indigenous people are treated with empathy, dignity and respect. There are a number of examples and stories told by Indigenous people who "have had experiences like being treated with contempt, judged, ignored, stereotyped, racialized, and minimized" (Health Council of Canada, 2012, 8). Cultural competency relies on practitioners' skills, knowledge and attitudes to change how they welcome, support and interact

with people (Lévesque, 2017). Cultural humility goes a step further. Humility requires constant reflection, self-evaluation and self-criticism in an effort to understand our personal prejudices, develop and maintain partnerships and respectful relationships based on mutual trust, and bridge the power divide (FNHMA and CFHI, 2020). Developing cultural humility consists in being open to learning about cultures that are different from our own. It presupposes ongoing learning and the continuous renewal of knowledge.

The objective of cultural competency and humility is to create cultural safety. The Consortium d'animation sur la persévérance et la réussite en enseignement supérieur (CAPRES, 2018) eloquently describes the concept of cultural safety as it applies to First Nations students in the education system: At the very heart of First Nations-Non-Indigenous relations, the creation of cultural safety implies:<sup>1</sup>

- considering the impact of colonization and the resulting trauma;
- recognizing and respecting cultural and social differences;
- understanding the issues First Nations people face today, whether they live in a remote area or in an urban environment;
- being willing to collaborate with First Peoples in the development, delivery and evaluation of services and initiatives intended for them;
- adopting service models and practices that take First Peoples' values, cultures and realities into account;
- adopting a collective or institutional willingness to change our ways of doing things in order to ensure social justice and innovation.

Whether or not an environment is culturally safe is up to the Indigenous community. Cultural safety implies the creation of relationships of trust with Indigenous parents and students and the recognition of the impact of socioeconomic conditions, history and policies on education. Once cultural safety has been created, Indigenous students and parents feel recognized, respected and safe at school. The entire school is involved in achieving cultural safety: on a daily basis, in the classroom, in the school yard, in policies, in service offerings, etc. It is a lengthy process that must be headed by the principal and the entire school team, and that must respect each student's learning curve. The

Matinamagewin course allows participants to begin or continue this reflection process that is so important to the development of cultural safety.

The second solution proposed by several researchers and described in a number of reports is the decolonization of education. In her work *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, Battiste (2013) says that the rejection of racism inherent in colonial education systems and the repositioning of Indigenous humanities, sciences and languages as vital fields of knowledge are central to this process. She believes in the need for a revitalized knowledge system which incorporates both Indigenous and Eurocentric thinking.

The Matinamagewin course proposes sharing Indigenous content and perspectives in the classroom in order to promote Indigenous identity, cultures, know-how and soft skills; enhancing the general culture and fighting "widespread misconceptions" and the "distorted public image" of Indigenous peoples as noted by Commissioner Viens in the CERP's report.

According to Viens, "Print and digital media are the primary sources of information about Indigenous peoples for most Quebecers. . . . As a result of this approach, there is very little representation of Indigenous realities in the media outside of crisis times . . . although it is important to note that things are improving" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2019, 210-211). Viens emphasizes the importance of dealing with these issues in the classroom (Call for Action no. 22) by recommending that educators "introduce concepts related to Indigenous history and culture as early as possible in the school curriculum" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2019, 250).

For all of these reasons, it is important for us to share authentic resources with participants during the course so that they can use them in the classroom. First, we recommend that participants encourage a contemporary perspective rather than stereotypes that have little to do with today's reality. It is also important to give priority to history, languages and cultures, and to invite guest speakers and First Nations or Inuit people living in urban and surrounding communities. In addition, presenting Indigenous models in various areas such as literature, song, cinema, politics, education and the environment in the classroom helps students understand their value and helps break down prejudice.

We encourage you to explore different ideas and resources available online:

- Wapikoni Mobile (<http://www.wapikoni.ca>): Short films giving Indigenous youth in Quebec and elsewhere a voice. You can search by nation or community, or download a teaching guide for secondary schools.
- FNEC (<https://ge.cepn-fnec.com/literature>): First Nations Youth Literature Inventory
- Espaces autochtones de Radio-Canada ([ici.radio-canada.ca/espaces-autochtones](http://ici.radio-canada.ca/espaces-autochtones)): news, informative vignettes, special files, etc.
- National Film Board (<https://www.nfb.ca/indigenous-cinema>): All NFB films directed by Indigenous film makers, such as Alanis Obomsawin
- Gabriel-Commanda Educational Kit by the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre (<http://en.caavd.ca/educationalkit>): An educational activity for each year, from kindergarten to Secondary V
- Legacy of Hope Foundation ([http://legacyofhope.ca/en\\_ca/portfolio-items/wherearethechildren](http://legacyofhope.ca/en_ca/portfolio-items/wherearethechildren)): Workshop activity guide on the residential school system
- Pierre LePage. *Mythes et réalités sur les peuples autochtones*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.: A wealth of information
- "Hanging Out" virtual exhibition (<http://lieuxderencontres.ca/en>): Indigenous youth open the doors of their community and share their contemporary reality. The Indigenous organization La boîte rouge vif has several authentic projects like this.

## IMPORTANT DAYS AND MONTHS



National Indigenous Peoples Day



Orange Shirt Day:  
Every Child Matters (day to recognize the harm the residential school system caused to the self-esteem and well-being of Indigenous children<sup>2</sup>)



National Day Honouring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls



National Indigenous History Month  
(to honour the history, heritage and diversity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada)

At the end of the course, we present various scenarios and invite participants to think about and discuss the issues at hand. The following are two scenarios presented at the 2019 Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples, along with participants' answers (good practices):

**Q:** Explain why the development of a meaningful relationship with students and parents is so important for Indigenous cultural safety?

**Answer:** Meaningful relationships contribute to a sense of belonging, trust, openness and an understanding of Indigenous culture. It is also important for educators to act differently and adapt their teaching so that students feel safe and don't have to fear being discriminated against.

**Q:** You tell students that there will be a pow-wow this weekend in a neighbouring community. A student asks you about the meaning of some of the dances. Should you ask an Indigenous student if she knows the answer? Why or why not?

**Answer:** No, you should ask the group because, if the Indigenous student doesn't know the answer, she could feel inadequate. The Indigenous student is not necessarily an expert in her culture. You need to know your students and ask them questions beforehand. Then you'll know if they are comfortable speaking to the class and sharing their experiences

In conclusion, UQAT's Continuing Education Department is proud to have developed the *Matinamagewin*<sup>3</sup> course, which allows teachers to take the time to reflect on the importance of the development of cultural competency and humility, as well as on the incorporation of Indigenous content and perspectives into their practices. With this course, UQAT's Continuing Education Department hopes that teachers will be better equipped to promote Indigenous identity and combat ignorance and prejudice. ♦

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to CAPRES (2018), this is a responsibility rather than an adaptation.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about Orange Shirt Day: <http://orangeshirtday.org>.

<sup>3</sup> For more information or to take the course, contact UQAT's Continuing Education Department at [fc@uqat.ca](mailto:fc@uqat.ca), or visit our website: <http://uqat.ca/formation-continue>.

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